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Extracts.

AN ADVENTURE WITH CHINESE "BLACK MILITIA."

It was a bright and frosty morning, in the winter of 1862, when I left my house on the bund at Shanghai, and walking across the river, went on board my trim little shooting-boat to breakfast.

The *Lily* was lying moored to the quay, so I stepped right on to her deck and stamped off the Shanghai mud—the famous Shanghai mud—from the soles of my long shooting-boots. I felt a great though subdued pleasure in doing so, for I was off on a week's shooting excursion, and experienced a grim satisfaction as well in leaving that tensions mud to other foreign residents not so fortunate as myself.

"Poor wretches," thought I, "how they will slip, stick, and founder about the mud in a day or two, when the thaw comes on!"

The mud of Shanghai is unlimited in quantity—and much mud is neither pleasant nor agreeable. No wonder, therefore, that my spirits left elated at the glorious prospect of an escape from the dirty, uncouth city, and a run into the open country.

Nature, I fancy, must have intended me for an adventurer, but fate made a mistake in thrusting me in to fill up an empty octagon in the great mercantile house of Biyem, Hall & Company—as very exuberant were my sensations of delight upon shouldering my gun, donning strange wearing apparel, and turning my back upon civilization, and so very distasteful to my feelings were the atrocious and monotonous calculations of long oaks, gray shirtings, chests of tea, and barrels of silk. Although the scarcity of game reduced me to groans, I enjoyed the combined cruise and ramble not a little. I say cruise and ramble, because the *Lily* took me wherever I wished to go, Southern and Central China, being most minutely intersected by a vast labyrinth of creeks and canals, which lead in every direction, and because, when so inclined, I shouldered my gun and took a stroll ashore. The pantry was well stocked—as junior partner in the firm I had charge of the stores—and A-yow was a first-rate cook; moreover, the cabin of the little *Lily* was fitted up with every comfort and convenience, so all things considered, no wonder I enjoyed "roughing it."

At that time the great civil war was raging its fiercest in the neighborhood of Shanghai, and the whole country had been desolated by the alternate passage of the Imperial and Revolutionary armies. The terrible Taiping rebels had lately captured the treaty-port Ningpo, and had followed up their success by surrounding Shanghai, which city would also have fallen to their victorious arms had not the British authorities commenced a most reprehensible and unjustifiable intervention against them. However, that as it may, the Taipings were drawn back from Shanghai, and the Imperialists, with their English allies, held all the country for a radius of about twenty miles round, though the line was very irregular, and in some places an investing army of one side or the other had been for months lying entrenched before some walled city held by the opposite party. Upon either side of the before mentioned radius line stretched debatable ground—that is to say, a sort of "no man's land," held by neither side, but, as experience taught me, infested by bandits—those lively and particularly unscrupulous gentz who had received the sanguinary cognomen of the "Black Militia."

The creation of the second day of my cruise found the little *Lily* at a very lonely, wild and desolate part of the country, near the destroyed village of Loo-cha-ee. Small lakes, broad lagoons, creeks and canals, like a very eccentric spider's web made in the dark, joined and intersected one another in every direction in the most bewildering manner conceivable.

The land was uninhabited, and thickly strewn with bleached, white skulls and ghastly, decaying skeletons, gleaming out here and there from amidst tall, rank grass. A dense growth of weeds, rushes, and thickets stretched over the country, and in many places quite covered in the sluggish running streams, making a dark and unbroken canopy of vegetation overhead.

Here the remains of a rotten boat, there the blackened rafter of a ruined house, and there a glimpse of some poor remnant of mortality gave terrible little touches to the weird and dismal scene of desolation and destruction.

During half the day we had been making our way through this strange wilderness, now sailing slowly along the weed-covered surface of a lake, where this twisting tangle of aquatic plants were so long and strong, and the rows had so much increased their exertions as to run us aboard.

A loud outcry followed this discharge of slugs, but still on our pursuers came, and the rowers had so much increased their exertions as to run us aboard.

Picking out the dark form of one who seemed to be the enemy's leader, I fired at him with my Minie point-blank. The unfortunate wretch sprang up several feet into the air, and then fell with a sullen plunge into the water.

We now entered one of the numerous creeks running out of the lake, and as the lighter *Lily*, once more well ahead of pursuers, shot into it, a salvo of artillery sent large jets of water dashing up all around her just before she became sheltered from our enemies' fire by the inequalities of the rank growths.

We knew that the pirates were following silently but steadily in our wake, and for half an hour we sculled along the creek, with all our number straining every nerve to do the best to the importance of our observations. At first I felt inclined to challenge the man he had accused of meditated treachery and falsehood.

A tremendous clanging of gongs arose, the pig-tailed warriors yelled their war-voices furiously, and were quickly ready to fight or flee—perhaps the former in this case, as we were only one to twenty—and I had the pleasure of knowing that the red little glowing sparks at the bow of each gun-boat were matches about to be applied to the touch-holes of their guns.

Another moment, and there, "Tab paou!"—Fire away! Fire the guns! Fire the guns!—arose; and then the loud roar of more than a dozen pieces of artillery echoed over the still waters with a deafening thunderous reverberation, while several rounds of shot came crashing through the *Lily's* sides, and the rest went plashing or whizzing around.

It was had enough to be attacked and fired upon by "Black Militia," but to be treated in like manner by our Imperialist allies was dreadful:

"Don't fear—don't fear! It's a foreigner from Shanghai!" I shouted.

"The valiant warriors of the Flower Mts. Kinglung" tested on their cars, blew their matches very vigorously again and seemed to hold a consultation—judging by the loud and confused confusion of voices that arose, all speaking together in true Chinese style. Then some fellow shouted: "Who comes?"

I called out again, adding that I was on my way to the imperial city of Quinsan, but had lost my way, and was fleeing from a squadron of "Black Militia," whom I had been lately attacked.

Then the row-galleys, with guns painted and matches glowing, advanced upon us from every side. Their commander came on board and said, "We are the Black Militia, and shall himself as to their truth of my story, and then, after ordering his soldiers to join in our retreat and pull with might and main away from the dredged depredators in our wake, became quite ready over cherry-brandy, a beverage possessing much power over a Chinaman's heart.

Having proceeded with caution, and without slightest alarm, my appearance was not noticed by a figure in the dark. This individual, I soon became aware, was standing with his book to me, so as to hide his eyes from coming after—but exhibit them to me after the communication with which I had so lately been favored; this dubious procedure raised all my suspicions. Stealing softly and slowly forward, my doubts were changed into certainty when the flickering rays of the lamp revealed the scoured, awfully, and rather forbidding features of the mandarin.

Observing my appearance, A-yow came aft, making his way through the wiry parasites and osers closing over the deck.

"Well, boy," said I, "where the deuce have we got to now?"

"Hi-ow, master," he replied, "no seavz know." At this point that foolish boy Lowder had made forget which way walked.

"Confound the rascal! Come here, Li-oh! Li-oh, Lowder!" I cried.

Mostly advanced that modest sailor, with rather downcast eyes, from which came only glances, but now evidently he dreaded Anglo-Saxon—neither knave, nor was ready to jump out of the way.

Lowder could not speak English, so I told A-yow to ask him whether he had lost his way.

After a long colloquy, culminated by considerable "hi-yah-ing" and gesticulation, my boy said:

"He too much fool! Stop talkie number one, save which place stop just now—

Knowing by experience the obtuse nature of the Lowder's steeds, I did not feel inclined to doubt the accuracy of my boy's conclusion, though I did feel strongly tempted to try

the effect of my compatriots' armaments ad hominem abroad. But then I remembered he had tried hard in Shanghai to make me engaged to a second Lowder—a native of the parts to be visited—and that I had refused to do so, not perceiving the necessity, as he had in answer to my questions, steadily persisted in the assertion that he was himself acquainted with the inland navigation. I might have known that his national pride forbade any admission of ignorance to a foreign devil, and that his confessed as much as his dignity would permit when he asked for an assistant.

"Go to Quinsan!" I roared in Chinese. "Good! Heaven-ly good!" ejaculated the Lowder.

"Be quick, you dog!" I added, fiercely, exclaiming my Chinese vocabulary.

"Good! Heaven-ly good!" returned the impudent wretch, as he went forward to the crew, a momentary illumination of intelligence appearing upon his broad, fat features; and then he cried to the astonished marines—"Row, row to Quinsan!"

Quinsan was a walled city on the twenty-mile-long line and formed the head-quarters of the disciplined and foreign-officed Imperialist legions. It was anxious to get there in order to spend a jolly evening with some of the officers who were friends of mine.

Once more the Lowder's anaesthetic countenance beamed vacantly from his station at the helm, whilst the crew made a great show of working hard to pull the *Lily* ahead. The opening of a larger creek presently appeared, and in it we plunged, though I had a vague suspicion that this was only a little more than three English miles distant; and I returned to the cabin satisfied—satisfied that I could only "grin and bear it."

Not long afterward I felt the motion of the vessel cease again; and then A-yow came into the cabin, commissioned by the unlucky Lowder to communicate the pleasant information that he could not find their way till daylight, but that he had anchored in a convenient place for the night.

"Yes, I am here!" cried the fellow whom I had lashed to the mast, in the same vernacular.

Other words, which I could not understand were shouted from the strange craft; but I gave the traitor another knock to keep him quiet.

The pursuing vessel was within ten yards; there was evidently an acquaintance between her crew and the man whom I engaged at Shanghai, and who beyond doubt, had it in his power to stop "Black Militia."

This startling announcement instantly disabated what indecision I felt, for it was well known that nothing could save the debatable ground occupied by those bandits without being attacked.

"Nonsense, A-yow!" said I, pettishly. "Why, there is not any such country between Shanghai and Quinsan."

"My master, allowed he; but my uncles boat stop 'ween Shanghai and Quinsan."

"This desperate marauders were not, however, so easily daunted with prey in view. Although one or two men had evidently fallen at my first fire—at that range the heavy rifled bullet might have easily pierced several—before I had reloaded my deadly weapon, a sudden flash, followed by a loud roar, informed me that even the smallest of our pursuers carried artillery.

"Now, then, let them have it; make sure you don't miss. Fire away!" I cried.

"All right, master," replied my plucky boy, stepping up to the trirail, and carefully firing both barrels of his piece.

A loud outcry followed this discharge of slugs, but still on our pursuers came, and the rowers had so much increased their exertions as to run us aboard.

Picking out the dark form of one who seemed to be the enemy's leader, I fired at him with my Minie point-blank. The unfortunate wretch sprang up several feet into the air, and then fell with a sullen plunge into the water.

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We knew that the pirates were following silently but steadily in our wake, and for half an hour we sculled along the creek, with all our number straining every nerve to do the best to the importance of our observations. At first I felt inclined to challenge the man he had accused of meditated treachery and falsehood.

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"Just then my boy and the Lowder came running on deck to see what had caused the noise. Time, however, was allowed for explanation. Harshly and gratingly, as they folded from side to side, the crackling sound of竹子—the large car with which Chinese boats are propelled—could be plainly heard through the stillness of the night. The light held by the traitor had no doubt been seen, and by his friends, the "Black Militia," were upon us.

"Lowder, I yelled, "get the men up-quick!" And A-yow repeated the order to him.

The cable having been slipped, all hands were hard at work swaying backward and forward of the heavy gales with all their strength, and propelling the *Lily* through the vegetation-nourished waters of the lake toward the black-looking shore. We were going somewhere, but I do not think a soul on board had the remotest idea. All we knew was that our direction lay straight away from the long dark shadows now visible through the vapory mist hanging over the water astern.

Hoarse yell of "Tab! Tab!"—Flight Flight!—echoed horribly after us through the darkness. The dreaded marauders were hard at work, and the heavy gales were driving steadily at our wake—all but one, a much lighter craft than the rest, which was coming.

"A-yow," said I, "I am certain that Quinsan was a walled city on the twenty-mile-long line and formed the head-quarters of the disciplined and foreign-officed Imperialist legions. It was anxious to get there in order to spend a jolly evening with some of the officers who were friends of mine.

Once more the Lowder's anaesthetic countenance beamed vacantly from his station at the helm, whilst the crew made a great show of working hard to pull the *Lily* ahead.

"Good! Heaven-ly good!" ejaculated the Lowder.

"Be quick, you dog!" I added, fiercely, exclaiming my Chinese vocabulary.

"Good! Heaven-ly good!" returned the impudent wretch, as he went forward to the crew, a momentary illumination of intelligence appearing upon his broad, fat features; and then he cried to the astonished marines—"Row, row to Quinsan!"

Quinsan was a walled city on the twenty-mile-long line and formed the head-quarters of the disciplined and foreign-officed Imperialist legions.

It was the capital of the province of Kiangsu, and the seat of the provincial government.

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